

Written by Thom White
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Beautiful vocalizations, rich harmonies, nuanced performances, and a fun, interesting set aside, what I enjoyed most about Saturday's performance of the District Theatre's *A New Brain* was that the musical felt both familiar and original; it's a fresh take on musical theatre, yet doesn't suggest any unnecessary effort made to reinvent the wheel. With its songs by William Finn and book by Finn and James Lapine, the piece manages to be odd, joyful, irreverent, and silly all at once, but also delivers an overarching sense of hope without being pandering or sugary.

Many of Finn's melodies are stunning, with smart lyrics, and even the weakest of this production's singers still do them justice in emotional (if not always musical) tone. I wasn't surprised to find out, while researching this musical, that it's autobiographical, as the story seems so personal, recounting Finn's experience with arteriovenous malformation and the high-risk craniotomy required to correct the brain issue. Yet despite the heavy subject matter, there's such a bright, sometimes bouncy nature to most of the songs that this isn't an oppressive tale, but rather one of optimism and endurance. And on top of that, it's great to see *A New Brain*

rendered so beautifully by director James Fairchild and his cast.

CAT-Scan-tastic: "A New Brain," at the District Theatre through March 22

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DistrictTheatre.com